



The Foundation Connection

A monthly e-newsletter from the Master Gardener Foundation of King County

Cesar Chavez Demonstration Garden: A Garden for the People

...by Master Gardener Marty Byrne



The entrance to El Centro. CCDG is on the left.

The Cesar Chavez Demonstration Garden (CCDG) on the property of El Centro de la Raza (El Centro) is truly a garden *para la raza*. The garden's variety of plants reflects the diversity of cultures in the Beacon Hill neighborhood. Lead Master Gardener Mick Duggan has overseen changes to the garden that included clearing it down to the glacial till and renovating it out of hiding behind a grapevine, an old oak tree and a hedgerow.

CCDG has been a fixture in the neighborhood since 1985. The garden was the result of efforts by the Seattle Food Garden Project to promote backyard food garden education. The garden has always been tended by volunteers: along with people from El Centro and the community, Master Gardeners have been involved since the garden's beginnings. The garden was expanded in 2000 with the help of a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services.

CCDG underwent a major renovation in 2013-2014, a partnership between El Centro and the Seattle Parks Department. Personnel reorganizations at Seattle Parks and a decision to delay construction past the summer of 2013 postponed the start of construction until that fall. Mick recalls some of the actions he and other volunteers took to prepare for the renovation and to restore the garden afterward. He and a team of Master Gardeners dug out plants they wanted to save and boarded them with local businesses, MGs and volunteers. Because of the delays, the plant boarders nurtured those plants for almost a year. Mick was pleased that Master Gardeners were involved in the planning at every stage at the request of El Centro. He remembers, "During construction, it was completely fenced off. You couldn't even go in there. I snuck in a few times to take pictures during the construction." There was a minimal garden in 2013 but once the renovation finished in March of 2014, the Master Gardeners could really recreate the demo garden.

The garden now boasts some 22 raised beds, 15 of which are part of a clear rotation plan. The rotation plan is based on plant families: each plant family grouping fills three beds. This showcases the variety within a plant family: shelling peas, snow peas and snap peas, for example. The garden mirrors the dietary differences between Asian, Filipino, Korean, African-American, Russian and Latino communities. Mick once offered epazote from the garden to the cook in the canteen at El Centro. "She goes, 'What's that?'" making him wonder what he'd missed. Her assistant said, "Yes, yes, I'll take it!" to the offer of epazote. Mick learned that epazote is a staple in Mexican kitchens but not in Puerto Rican cooking. The assistant is from Mexico, the cook is from Puerto Rico.

Mick admits to being partial to heirloom plants. Two Japanese families brought heirloom tomato seeds to the garden to save them. One of the other gardeners he'd been coaching over the past couple of years was delighted to bring back tomatoes that she had grown from seed. The garden also grows lots of greens. All the produce goes to the onsite food bank at El Centro, which supplies food for the senior lunch program, a mass lunch open to anyone and the child development center onsite. The Master Gardeners don't weigh the donated produce. According to Mick, "If we provide a lot of greens, they don't weigh much. If we grow a lot of potatoes, we'd have the weight!"



CCDG raised beds.

CCDG partners with other community groups for events, festivals and garden tours. Mick relates that the Beacon Hill ESL (English as a Second Language) program likes to bring its students to the garden. Seeing plants from their native lands helps them open up and talk, not easily accomplished in other settings. The clubhouse for the Washington State Federation of Garden Clubs is nearby, with a 100-year-old pear tree on their property. In 2015, Master Gardeners from CCDG joined City Fruit and the Beacon Food Forest at the clubhouse for a day-long "Pear-a-dise" festival, when neighbors exchange pear recipes, pick the pears and learn about fruit tree culture from the Seattle Tree Fruit Society.

"Renovate" means to "reinvigorate; refresh; revive." The renovation at CCDG has certainly accomplished that. You'll find the history of the garden and renovation in Mick's article [here](#).



A perfect day for drying onions.

CCDG's "friendly neighborhood plant sale" starts May 14th and runs until the weekend of May 28. Mick Duggan, Master Gardeners and volunteers will be there for work parties on Saturdays from 10 am to 1 pm and Wednesdays from 4 pm to 7 pm. Mick will be there at other times during the week but parking at CCDG can be challenging. "I try to put a Plant Sale sign up so people know we're in the Garden and they can shop." Some of the plants offered for sale: 22 varieties of tomatoes, assorted peppers sweet to hot, eggplants,

tomatillos, ground cherries, cucumbers and squash seedlings. There will also be a few kale, collard, broccoli, leek, onion and lettuce starts. The garden is located at 2524 16th Ave S, Seattle.